

Black Mountain College Newsletter

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Visiting speakers provoke discussions

Scott Buchanan

On February 5, Dr Scott Buchanan, Dean of St John's College in Annapolis, Maryland, came to Black Mountain to conduct a seminar on Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. In a panel of students and faculty members, Dr Buchanan opened the seminar with the question, "Was Oedipus happy?" which developed into an investigation of the nature of tragedy, the question of determinism in the play, and the problem of human suffering. Comparisons were drawn between Greek and Shakespearean tragedy in an attempt to find a common denominator for all tragedy. Later the discussion was opened to the audience, which included both community members and guests.

At informal meetings on the following day Dr Buchanan outlined some of the principles and beliefs on which St John's is based, and the similarities and differences between St John's and Black Mountain were discussed. Both colleges feel the generally accepted tendencies of modern education to be wrong, but the remedies they offer differ in many ways. The summary of the discussion here printed must be read with the understanding that it is the view of Black Mountain people, and that it attempts to compress—and therefore to over-simplify—the arguments on both sides.

What appeared in the discussion as a basic difference was the concept of man held by each college. St John's considers that, for purposes of education, man must be looked at as a rational being. Black Mountain believes that man is a thinking being. In line with its concept, St John's trains the mind, seeing the intellect as the whole educable man. Black Mountain, seeing man as a social being with the important attribute of thinking, is concerned with character, behaviour, social adjustment, "emotional maturity," as well as with purely academic training. St John's develops its philosophy into a teaching method which emphasizes the reading of great books, the seminar discussion, the formal lecture. Black Mountain works out a plan in which community living, physical labor, and work in the arts take their place beside class work. St John's follows a prescribed curriculum from which little deviation is allowed, for it believes that questions will arise with sufficient uniformity and regularity so that a fixed curriculum will generally provide the answers. Black Mountain believes that questions arise at different times, from different causes, and through different avenues, and that answers cannot be meaningful until questions arise. The curriculum, therefore, must be elective in order to achieve a flexible working balance between the